SAN JOSE HISTORICAL MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

an interview with

ROBERT C. DOERR
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This interview was conducted by Ellen Garboske; transcribed by Aletha Johnson; edited by; and supervised by Leslie Masunaga, Head Archivist.

Ellen Garboske: Welcome Bob.

Robert Doerr: Thank you.

EG: We're pleased to have you participate in San Jose Historical Museum's Oral History Program. Today's interview is going to concentrate on your involvement in local politics, but before we start into that I wonder if you could give us a little bit of background information. Could you tell us about your ancestors, when they came to San Jose and what they were doing?

RD: Yes, my grandfather's brother was the first one, he came in 1853. He was five years older than my grandfather who came in 1858, and I've often regretted the fact that I didn't interview my grandfather. He walked across the Isthmus of Panama in order to get to this side and come on up. We didn't even think about it at the time, that would have been an interesting story. He started a bakery which was on First Street where the Pavilion is now, and he lived on Second Street. In those days a lot of the owners of First Street businesses had their homes just a block or so away on Second Street so they were within walking distance. And he served on the City Council in the 1890's and then my father was on the City Council from 1924 to 42 so I sort of grew up with it. And then I was on the Council from 50 to 65. My son moved away from San Jose because he said he didn't want to have to serve on the City Council.

EG: When you were growing up with this did you discuss politics a lot? Did that influence you, having your father and grandfather --

RD: Yes. I'm sure I was aware of what was going on in the city. Quite frequently we would talk about things.

EG: I understand that your grandfather built the first brick building in San Jose; is that correct?

RD: Yes, probably. He had a number of buildings in the downtown area in addition to the bakery

which ran through from First to Second Street like I say, where the Pavilion is now. He also had a building on San Fernando Street which burned down about 1920 and it's now where the Museum of Art is being built on San Fernando Street.

EG: Do any of the Doerr buildings per se, do they still exist?

RD: No. Unfortunately, my father and his brother sold the building -- was actual the -- first sold to Crest. The Crest building occupied the old bakery site and then that was sold and so there's nothing left.

EG: And then you were born here in San Jose of course, what about your --

RD: My family was here and I was born here.

EG: What about your family homes, are they still there?

RD: Yes, I was born on Williams Street and that house is still there; and then I grew up about a half a block away on Fifth and Williams and that house is still there.

EG: So you do have some family homes still here but they aren't -- none of your family is living in these?

RD: No, I have one brother who lives over in Boulder Creek.

EG: And what about the schools that you attended here?

RD: Typical, I went to Lowell Elementary School, Woodrow Wilson Junior High School and San Jose High School. When I got out of high school I wanted to go to Stanford I had planned that all my life. but I was so disappointed actually I had just spent nine months on the road. When I got out of high school I didn't want to go right to college and so I wandered around the country for nine months, sort of a semi-hobo and then to go from that to Stanford where you had a group of students who had no -- they were not affected by the depression at all, this was in 1932 right at the very bottom of the depression. And it was a little disillusioning to me, to see these people had no idea what was going on in the country and so after my freshman year I came back to San

Jose State and the contrast was so great that I stayed there until I graduated and then of course I actually did four years of graduate work at Stanford.

EG: And then when did you -- you served in the military, when did you go into that?

RD: Yes, I spent some time in 1936 just wandering around in Europe and I came back, got married in 1937 and I thought that I would settle down; but when the war started I had seen so much of Hitler that I felt that I had to be involved. So I volunteered. And after basic training they took a look and said well, you've been in Germany and you speak the language and we want you to go to language school, "Oh, no thank you", but a week later they called me back again and said you're going to language school.

EG: They didn't give you much choice?

RD: In those days the army had taken over programs at various colleges and I was sent to UCLA for a year and then a quarter of advanced work at Stanford and then back to a military intelligence school near Washington. And then I finally became a counter intelligence agent and went back to Germany. And when the war ended I was in the group that went to Berlin and one of the things we tried to do was try to find out what had happened to Hitler. We interviewed the people that had been with him, then we were convinced that he had committed suicide.

EG: That he really died at --

RD: Oh,sure, there was no other explanation.

EG: That all sounds like a very interesting story and I hope that some day we can also do a tape on it, your serving in Germany.

RD: People never lose interest. I've been talking, in fact, I'll be talking Wednesday again to a service club about Hitler. I've made over 200 talks on this subject.

EG: Well, what about after you came back from the army?

RD: We had lived in Carmel before the war, in fact, my wife stayed there while I was gone.

Fortunately we had built a house in 1941 just before the war started and so she stayed there and I thought we'd stay in Carmel, but when I came home we discovered that our daughter had asthma and the doctor said, you've got to get to a dryer climate and so we moved to San Jose. And I came back in 1946 and in 1950 I was approached by a group of people and was asked to run for City Council, so I did.

EG: But that was after your grandfather being -- serving on the City Council and your father, then you; it sort of came naturally for you?

RD: Yeah.

EG: In 1950 when you ran for City Council can you tell us a little about what it was like to run for a public office at that time?

RD: Well, at first I was a little naive about running and I thought you should run on issues. I was approached by a number of people who thought that water was the big issue at that time and so we decided that the platform would be buy out the San Jose Water Works. The Hetch Hetchy line was coming through Santa Clara Valley and under the Federal Law the water – the water could only be sold to a public agency and San Jose Water Works was private and so they could not hook on to the Hetch Hetchy line; so we thought okay,let's buy the Water Works. Well, we didn't realize we were uncovering a can of worms. That was probably the dirtiest campaign in history. I was running with a friend of mine by the name of Alden Campen whose brother Howard was the County Executive for many years. And between the two of us we raised $3000 and in those days that was a little bit of money, but the opponents raised $50,000. And they bought out full page ads in the paper, they bought out all the radio stations and they just really went after it. One of my regrets is Alden lost and some how or another I managed to win. So anyway, at that time I was the only one interested and I couldn't get a second to a motion. Rather interesting six years later when I was mayor, we had a unanimous vote to start the

procedures to buy the Water Works.

EG: I guess part of the issue was the Hetch Hetchy line -- is San Jose connected to that or did they become connected to that?

RD: Later what happened, they built the South Bay Aqueduct and they brought that water in and San Jose Water Works still can't directly use it but the water is put underground and then they can pump it up and use it themselves.

EG: What about pay for councilmen?

RD: Well, in all those years, 15 years, the pay remained at $5.00 a week for both mayor and council. Five dollars a week. Ever so often, in fact, every election we would have something on the ballot that we were going to try to raise it to $15 and people turned that down. No matter what the proposition was it was always turned down. The people's attitude was well if they're stupid enough to work for that that's all they deserve. And the result was that nobody wanted the office of mayor more than one term because it was a full time job but at $5.00 a week obviously unless you were independently wealthy, you had to have another job. And I arranged, I was teaching at the time, I arranged to have all my classes in the morning so that I'd go to the City Hall at noon and go to meetings in the afternoons and evenings. And there were times during those years as mayor when I would get home at night after everybody would be asleep and I would get up in the morning before anybody else did and I wouldn't see my family until the weekend. It's one of those things you're glad you did but you wouldn't want to do it again, not under those circumstances anyway.

EG: You mentioned teaching, now you taught for what, 39 years at San Jose City College?

RD: Well not all at -- 39 years altogether; the last 18 were at San Jose City College. I had taught in Carmel, and down in the San Joaquin Valley and then came back and started at San Jose High and Lincoln High, Willow Glen High and then over at City College.

EG: You were elected to the City Council in 1950, this was shortly after the end of World War II. We talked before about you going back there, but can you give us an idea of what the effects of World War II were on San Jose and this area?

RD: Yes, of course. There was a big boom, population boom. People would come through here and decide they liked it and they wanted to come back, so it was a real housing shortage. We had a very difficult time to find a place to live, my wife and I and the family. We finally found a house in Campbell, we stayed there for one year and then we found a house in San Jose and we moved into town in 1947. But that was very, very difficult and of course this also brought up the problems of annexation in order to have the area for houses to be built, so you were beginning that boom there in the late 40's.

EG: About this time Dutch Hamann was appointed City Manager, I believe?

RD: He was appointed in March of 1950 and I was elected in May of 1950 so I wasn't in on his appointment, but we came in at almost the same time, right.

EG: And I understand he was very big on annexation, I think they had a kind of nickname for him Dutch's Hamann's Panzers, which I suppose came out of World War II?

RD: Yeah, actually I opposed him on many things. A lot of people had the idea he had a rubber stamp to the council but that wasn't the case at all. He lost a lot of the arguments, the problem was that the public wasn't aware of it. A lot of those were held in the -- I guess you could call them the star chamber sessions. In those days you didn't have the Brown Act which insisted that all meetings be open, and we had a lot of closed meetings. I could give you a number of examples of that where the -- well we couldn't stop the growth, these people were going to be here anyway and one example would be the Emporium. The Emporium came to San Jose, or the owners of 40 acres on the corner of Winchester and San Carlos, came to San Jose and wanted it to be zoned commercial. It was simply an orchard at the time and San Jose turned them down.

And so they went to Santa Clara and Santa Clara said sure we'll give you anything you want. San Jose had already annexed the area north of the Emporium so they [Santa Clara] could not come down Winchester Road. Instead they put a big loop around and came down and annexed nothing but the road, nothing but the street.

EG: Now that is Stevens Creek?

RD: Stevens Creek. At that time the state had no law how wide an annexation had to be and so by just annexing the street they avoided having any property owners that could protest the annexation. Under the state law the property owners of course could protest but who owns the middle of the street? And so they picked up the Emporium and shortly after that Macy's came in, or the owners of the property where Macy's is, and San Jose knew that if they didn't give it to Macy's they would build in Santa Clara too. And a business such as that brings in a lot of money to the city for very little expense. Emporium, for example, had their own police and fire department and they were paying a lot of money not only in sales tax but in property tax and it cost the City of Santa Clara very little. Then shortly after that Ford came to San Jose and wanted annexation, that's the property where Milpitas is, and my argument was we didn't like what Santa Clara had done, we shouldn't do the same thing. We would have had to annex the Old Oakland Highway and add that strip of annexation. And so, in closed meeting we voted four to three to turn Ford down. So Ford wanted the municipal services so what they did was to send their people out and circulate petitions to incorporate the City of Milpitas. I always told people that I sort of felt like the godfather of Milpitas because of the fact we had pushed Ford into incorporating Milpitas so that they could get their municipal services. Probably Dutch was right on that, if that whole area -- of course if Ford had come in probably all of Milpitas would be part of San Jose and in terms of planning it probably would have been better. The same thing happened on Campbell. A number of property owners in Campbell came to Dutch and asked to

be annexed before Campbell was a city and the same thing happened. And we told Dutch, no, we don't want to have to send these lines out and pick up Campbell and he was probably right because we could have had better planning if it had all been under one. So what they did was the same thing, they wanted municipal services so they incorporated Campbell. But he was given a lot of credit or blame depending on the viewpoint as to his annexation. Actually because of this business of the property owners having a protest one of the problems was that we didn't annex large areas. If a property owner didn't want to be annexed he would go around him and pick up the property owner behind him that wanted to be annexed. And of course the same thing happened when IBM came along. They wanted to be a part of the city so there was quite a bit of talk at that time of incorporating a city of South San Jose. And so rather than have that what they did do was put this annexation down Monterey Highway to pick up IBM.

EG: I see. So that was -- there were places that were county all on both sides of Monterey Highway also?

RD: Right, so you only had to pick up the property owners who wanted annexation.

EG: I read that there were a total of 491 annexations between 1950 and 1960 and of course during this whole time you were either on the city council or mayor.

RD: Yeah, I dropped my opposition to it after I saw what was going to happen. If we didn't annex they would form their own cities and I had been going into these various meetings back east where we saw the horrible situation around Chicago which is completely surrounded by all these little independent cities; or around St. Louis, I think there are some 90 little cities surrounding St. Louis. And I thought if we don't want that to happen and we'd better make sure, again for planning purposes, that it be part of the city but of course unfortunately there was the fact that there were still all these other cities that were available. The property owners that weren't in any city would play one city off against the other in order to get what they wanted or at that time the

county was in the act for there were a number of members of the board of supervisors that didn't like San Jose. And Story Road is a good example. They would go to the county and request commercial zoning and the county would give it to them and as soon as they got their commercial zoning they would annex to San Jose. So you have that hodge-podge out on Story Road. You'll have a residential area next to a commercial area and almost invaribly the commercial areas were zoned by the county to try to convince them not to join the city but then they joined anyway.

EG: When you look back on it are there things that you would have done differently than you've said about annexation?

RD: I think I might have pushed an idea that I had at the time for a rural system for the whole county. That was an idea that I had picked up in England where you have London which, Greater London, which has a whole series of boroughs and each borough has a certain amount of self-government, but then you have the Greater Metropolitan District which takes care of things like Scotland Yard and transportation and those things which are area wide. And then in each borough can make a decision as to what is going to happen in their little area and each borough had their own police force the constabulary, the bobbies, are all part of the boroughs. Something like that I think might have been very, very helpful for Santa Clara County. In 1958 I was president of the Santa Clara County Intercity Council and we -- I had been approached by a group that wanted to make a study of metropolitan government for Santa Clara County so I brought it up to the City Council and all the other cities said no way it may, in fact it probably would have demonstrated that they would have had to have given up some of their own autonomy and each little city council doesn't want to give up any of their power so the thing died. And I'm sorry that I didn't bring it up again. I didn't push the thing any further but I think I should of because I think the borough system is what this county needed, it's what it needs today.

EG: This borough system you refer to is that like they have in say New York or Brooklyn –

RD: Yeah, except those boroughs are very large. They only have five boroughs in New York and you have a borough like Brooklyn which has three million people and you really don't get to much local government in a borough that big. They have their borough city council but my idea of a borough would be smaller units where they know who the members of their council -- the members of their borough council and they have some input on the local level. Whereas in the New York -- yeah, a little like that except I wouldn't have just five boroughs I would have a lot of them.

EG: What were your fellow councilmen and officers, San Jose officers like, who were you working with and can you tell us some of the big issues or some of the stories?

RD: I was sort of the maverick to begin with. A lot of those votes they would be six to one or no vote, but I learned in those first two years that I'd better learn how to work with these other people if I wanted to get anything done and we finally got around to the point that we could argue about issues but never get into personalities and I consider -- unfortunately most of them are dead now-- I consider George [Starbird] a good personal friend even though he was quite conservative and I was a liberal and we could argue about issues but we never carried it beyond the council meetings and I still consider him a good friend. And that's one of the things I learned in those first two years is to disagree withoug being disagreeable.

EG: And what about Albert Ruffo?

RD: I only served two years with him, he's still around. He was -- his last two years were my first two years so I got to know him pretty well, but not as well as George because we came on together.

EG: When you were elected to the City Council were they electing the mayor then or were they still appointing?

RD: The mayor was appointed by the other members. And they simply wrote a letter to the senior

person and as I say nobody ever tried to get another term. When George Starbird, who was my predecesor, left the job as mayor he had a liberation party because the job was actually a full time job. You had all the cermonial things. The City Manager of course did the running of the city, the business end, but the mayor had to be there for ground breaking, ribbon cutting, and greeting visiting delegations, conventions, it was just a full time job. As I say when I became mayor one of the things that they never had before was a vice mayor and I insisted that anything that happened in the morning when I'd be in class of course I couldn't attend so they appointed Louie Salera as vice mayor and any morning duties why he would take over, but afternoon I was the one who would be there for whatever the ceremonial things might be.

EG: Was the City Manager pretty strong at that time?

RD: Oh, yes.

EG: Versus the Mayor's office?

RD: Oh yeah, he did the actual running. The City Council did actually set the policy in spite of what people might have thought who weren't aware of it, but the City Manager then was the one to carry out the policy. On annexation, for example, first we turned him down a number of times. Later I swung over to support him but the policy was set by the council. Of course Dutch had a lot of influence in terms of what he thought about me, but he wasn't the final decision maker.

EG: I guess there were a lot of pretty influential people around the city at that time. It was growing so much and one of the big influences was the media, San Jose Mercury News.

RD: Yes, Joe Ridder did have quite a bit of influence, he supported the city. One of my gripes with the current ownership of the paper is that they seem to love to take out after any little discrepancy that happens in the city whereas under Joe Ridder he wouldn't print anything. We had a member of the council who is now dead so I won't mention his name, he was picked up for being drunk and disorderly over and over again. His name never appeared in the paper. A few years ago

a councilman under the papers present ownership was picked up for being drunk, that hit the paper and he was defeated. They made a big issue out of that so there's a completely different point of view, of playing up all of the things that are wrong today and completely burying anything that went wrong under Joe.

EG: Maybe went a little too far?

RD: That's right.

EG: Yet the public is better aware of what is going on now?

RD: They -- the public knows more of what is going on. I just wish they wouldn't get all the trivial things, and try to make issues out of things that really aren't important.

EG: I'm afraid that's kind of human nature.

RD: Oh, yeah.

EG: Way back in the early years of San Jose they elected the mayor in an overall community election and then they went to the appointment by the city council and then I guess after you were through in about 1969 they went back to electing the mayor again and I believe at that time it was Ron James. What is your feeling on this, the election versus the appointment and throwing in the city manager too?

RD: Yes, I frankly feel that they've gone too far. One of my studies that I made was the study of various types of city government. And city governments in California had the reputation of being the best, the cleanest city governments in the United States and one of the reasons was the fact that almost all of the cities used the city manager form of government, that even in San Francisco where you have a mayor actually the mayor doesn't have too much appointment power. The power of appointment is one of the big items that leads to formation of machines and Chicago would be a great example of course where you not only have a mayor making appointments, but all of the aldermen making appointments. And all of those people who worked for the city

obviously are not going to be out working for the incumbent because that means their job. One of the things that I don't like to see right now is the great number of people not only that the mayor appoints but each councilman appoints. Now we don't have a machine now but you have the rudimentary effects of the possibility of having a machine type, of having a lot of people whose job depends on getting their incumbent reelected. My grandfather served in those days. He was the councilman from the third ward They had wards like you have districts now, and the mayor was elected at large. You had machine politics then. The family story was he was not reelected because he was not renominated because he wouldn't go along with the machine.

EG: What was the machine then?

RD: Well the machine consisted of the mayor and the councilmen that went with him because they controlled all the appointments.

EG: I see.

RD: So they say when my grandfather refused to go with them why they wouldn't even renominate him.

EG: From what I read in the early years there was a group called the Southern Pacific Political Machine and they were in power and then about 1915 the reformers came in. And in the 1920's the Southern Pacific Machine came back into power again and at that time was when Charlie Bigley came into --

RD: Yeah, they made a big issue out about the Bigley Machine, even Harry Farrell wrote it up as if it were an actual machine, but that was when my father was on the council and never once did Bigley ever approach him about doing anything. They didn't have a machine where they just snapped their fingers and had people jump. They may have had a little influence with a few appointments but not that much influence. It wasn't a machine like you have running things back in Chicago. In 1915 as you mentioned that was when the charter was adopted putting in the city

manager form of government. And it's true that the Southern Pacific had a lot of influence but by the 1930's their influence had diminished to the point where one of the big issues was getting the Southern Pacific Railroad line off of 4th street. It used to come right through the middle of town, right down 4th Street. And I remember my father making that a big issue, of fighting the Southern Pacific to get them to move and they finally did, they finally were moved out about 1936 to their present line so they took it off of 4th Street.

EG: Now people like Charlie Bigley and was it Goodwin?

RD: Goodwin was the city manager at the time.

EG: They had Dutch Hamann too. When they got into office they remained there for 15, 20, 30 years even; not like today where they turn over so quickly.

RD: Well there was a little issue back there while I was gone; I was gone from San Jose from '36 to '46 and I'm not sure of the details but the one group managed to put on the ballot a provision that the subject be put to a vote of confidence. Well the first vote of confidence that Clarence Goodwin had he won and then the city council turned around and fired him anyway and that caused a lot of– a big furor as you can imagine and as a matter of fact the man that they appointed to take his place lost the vote of confidence two years later when his name was on the ballot; he was a victim of circumstances because he was a good man but the public was so irritated by the fact that the council had gone against their wishes that they simply voted against the next person. And that provision remained, that vote of confidence, until the new city charter was put in in 1965 and then it was taken out, but Dutch always got his vote of confidence. Obviously the majority of the people seemed to feel that he was doing a good job.

EG: And he was a very strong–

RD: Oh yeah, he was the person that had the greatest influence of any one individual during that period, but he never made any attempts to try to, well – any underhanded attempts. I often told

the story that in all the years, of course this wouldn't be Dutch but this was the general attitude, never once was I approached by anybody with any kind of thing that could look like a bribe or any kind of favoritism, nobody ever approached me on that so I don't know whether anybody else was ever approached but there seemed to be a feeling that you just couldn't go out and buy yourself a bunch of votes on the council.

EG: Today we have a very strong mayor.

RD: I was opposed, I voted against the proposal, both proposals, that gave him more and more power because again I think that dilutes the city manager system and I think again the city manager system is the most efficient and also the cleanest. It's the most clean kind of government throughout the United States. Where they have the city manager you don't have the problems of the kinds of machines that you have elsewhere.

EG: What about some of the issues when you were -- when you were mayor or because the mayor was appointed from the City Council, during your years on the city council also. City Hall, for example, was downtown in that wonderful old Lenzen building

RD: Well, when the people voted to move it out of course then you had a City Hall that was vacant and I would like to have kept it, but every study that was made said that it would cost millions of dollars to fix it up. It had just barely survived the earthquake of 1906. It was being held together by a whole bunch of connecting rods and the city engineer said that every time he went in there he just prayed that there wouldn't be another earthquake because he said that he was sure it was going to fall down on top of him. We had a group of engineers, not just the city engineers but independent engineers, appraise the building then turned to the architects association and asked them what their viewpoint was and they came back and said it represents no style, tear it down, so all of the experts said. Plus from a financial point the city said we didn't have the "x" millions of dollars to renovate it and so reluctantly we voted that it had to be torn down.

Looking back now it's perhaps too bad that we didn't figure out some way to get the money. Maybe we should have had a bond issue and let the people vote whether or not to put up whatever it would have cost to renovate it.

EG: It was a wonderful old building.

RD: It was a picturesque building no question about it.

EG: I heard some stories about the City Council being upstairs and the holding cells for prisoners downstairs, can you tell us --

RD: Oh, yes the City Jail was right below us and the drunk tank was down there. And periodically they would have a fight in the drunk tank and so you'd have to stop the council meeting and they would send word down to keep those people quiet. That was happening all the time and then of course when the city and the county combined the jail was moved out to Hedding Street where it is now then we no longer had that problem. That happened even before the new City Hall was built.

EG: And you said that in later years you led a movement to move City Hall back downtown?

RD: Yeah, this while I was on the Redevelopment Agency and it became apparent that we were having a difficult time getting downtown redeveloped. There's a story on that also that there was a real plan developed for redevelopment. Three people who were going to be moved out didn't like it and they went to court. The developers had their financing all lined up. They had a beautiful plan but when this was in court none of the lending institutions would lend money figuring that if the court went the other way. Well on every level it started in the Superior Court decided in favor of the City, right up to the Appellate Court then actually went to the Supreme Court and they took one look at it and said there's no case, but that took three years and in the meantime why all of the plans fell apart. So there we were sitting with this vacant land and the original plans had to be dropped and so we were thinking what can be done to make good use

of this land. And one of the proposals was to move the City Hall back downtown and this was when the County was just ready to expand and the County made the City a financial offer for the City Hall before they put up their new building there on the corner of First and Hedding and we could have sold it to the County for enough money to have built a new City Hall downtown, but the voters voted against it.

EG: I see, it went on the ballot.

RD: It went on the ballot and it was voted down. They said let's keep it where it is even though financially it would have been a good deal for the City.

EG: I wonder if today they would have voted the same with all the redevelopment that is taking place downtown.

RD: Of course there would be no place to put it now.

EG: Now there's no room.

RD: Talking about issues of the early 50's, one of the things that I tried to do when I was first elected was to get the City to get into the field of Human Rights and I introduced a motion for a-- to set up some sort of a commission in this field and I couldn't get a second. This went on until finally in 1956 they said there is no problem in San Jose. So in 1960 when I became mayor I asked the council for permission to appoint a committee to study the problem of Human Rights in the City. I appointed a committee of people that were really very interested in the problem and for a year and a half they made a study and they came back and said, look, don't keep your head in the sand, there is a problem in San Jose. They would go, for example, into a hotel. They would have a black couple go in and they would say they were sorry we don't have any vacant rooms and the white couple would follow them a few minutes later and they would find that they had plenty of vacant rooms. But this sort of thing was going on and so when the evidence was presented the council said well we'd better do something about it. So San Jose appointed the first

Human Relations Commission in the State of California. And that is one of the things and they gave it to me to appoint the people so obviously I appointed people I knew were interested in this subject. That was one of the things that I felt the greatest accomplishments as mayor. That is, a lot of other things happened but this is one that I felt sort of a paternal interest in because I had been working on it for six years.

EG: I'd like to go back and talk more about the things that came up as a result of this committee, but hold that thought for just a moment. We were talking about the Human Rights issue in San Jose and you formed the committee, what do you feel the results were from this committee working?

RD: Well it was set up primarily as an educational group to try to convince people. They didn't have too much actual power to go in and force anything but if they would get a complaint of discrimination they would try to get together with the people who were being accused and see if they couldn't settle in some way. They did quite a bit of work on that score that is the commission was -- was a very good commission. One of the problems that I would recommend again not to try to do was to appoint people representing various groups because once you do that then if a group is left out they feel hurt. And we ran into that almost immediately when -- I'm not sure which one of these ethnic groups didn't have a member on there and they complained so they decided to enlarge the commission from seven to nine in order to take care of them. And pretty soon another group complained and so they enlarged it again and eventually they got up to 15 people.

EG: Well there are more than 15 ethnic groups in San Jose and you can't satisfy all of them. It would have been much better if we hadn't had any requirements at all in the beginning just get people that we knew were interested in the subject of Human Rights. But they actually did quite a bit of good. In fact, eventually the County got interested and they set up their own commission and they found that they that there was a good deal of duplication so they combined the two so now

it's the County Commission on Human Relations Commission for the whole county.

EG: This grew out of your city --

RD: Yes, it grew out of the City Commission because there was no need actually for two of them. This kind of a problem is not confined to city limits.

EG: You said that you didn't have any enforcing powers but what was the public's reaction to it? Did they go along pretty well? Did they allow the blacks to come into the hotels?

RD: Yes they -- just by persuasion they managed to break down a lot of the barriers. And of course in the 1950's, by now it was in the 1960's that the commission was working, the civil rights movement was getting a lot of publicity and you had all the marches in the south and the civil rights acts of '65 and so this came along right at the time that the public was very much aware of it. So you did have a lot more public support than you had in let's say 1950 when I first brought up the subject. The public was ready for it by 1960.

EG: And what about the other ethnic groups, other than Blacks, such as the Hispanic, we didn't have a large Asian population at that point not like we have today, but the Hispanics did they feel the benefits?

RD: Well we always tried to bring them in. That was a difficult group to work with because they had so many different leaders. You never knew which person you could go to who would get enough of a following to support some particular issue. They were fighting amongst themselves so much. We tried everything that came up. We would try to -- as a matter of fact, we tried to get if there was a particular issue where there were two people on different sides, we tried to get them both involved but it was difficult.

EG: It's still difficult today?

RD: It's still difficult today, yes. I found that out after I left the council. Back around 1966 or so

I organized a human rights panel out at San Jose City College and it was an all day affair and one of the groups from the Mexican American group the leader got up and walked out saying we don't have enough representation on your committee: we had brought in a couple of people. Unfortunately, they were not represented by the group that she was representing so several of them got up and walked out. I tried to say look this is why we're having this meeting to see if we can't find out where the problems are and see if we can't alleviate some of these things.

EG: Interesting. While you were mayor you got involved with the Sister Cities program?

RD: That's another one that I feel sort of a paternal feeling toward because I wrote the first letter to the Mayor of Okayama inviting him to become a part of our sister city. What had happened on this there had been a couple of feeble attempts to us having sister cities throughout the United States but the State Department felt that this was something that ought to be pushed and so they had what they called the office of private cooperation and they sent a person out here to San Jose and while their office in Japan, the United States information agency in Japan, had looked around and they had found the City of Okayama and when they contacted the United States and said we've got a City that is ready for a sister city. Can you find one in San Jose, I mean in the United States, so they came to San Jose and they presented the first to the senate of the adult education program and they thought it sounded like a good idea so they called me about it and I thought it was great so we talked about it for a while. Eventually we got support so we went to the City Council. The council agreed so I wrote the letter to Mayor Hammouchi of Okayama and it was started in 1957. And in '58, at the first anniversary, I went over to Japan to Okayama to represent San Jose on the first anniversary and I brought back with me the plans for the park which is right out here. That became the basis for the Japanese Friendship Garden. The plans were for Korakuen Park in Okayama and it was pretty much patterned after that park, so I do have sort of an interest in the whole program including the park that is out here.

EG: Looking at those the Okayama being the first sister city with San Jose and it being just about 12, 15 years after the end of World War II and we were at war with Japan, to be able to do that was so special to have this sister city.

RD: We found on my visit to Okayama there was a great deal of friendliness of wanting to become better friends to the United States. We had no feeling of any kind of hostility at all while we were there. That was really quite a visit. They took us around from 7:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night. They had us scheduled for visiting schools and shopping centers and clubs and you name it. We went and went and every place we went we were received with a great deal of warmth and friendliness. It was one of those trips that we were treated like royalty and I've often wondered how does royalty put up with that sort of a thing. I don't think I would want to do it very often but that program, the Okayama program, got an award as the best in the whole United States. Then a few years later when they were starting there were 70 --at that time there were about 75 cities in California alone that had sister cities and most of them in Japan. And then the Reader's Digest got into the act and they had this contest and San Jose got the award for being the best one in the whole country. One of the problems that has come up lately is that San Jose has adopted too many sister cities. Five is too many. You can't do a good job if you spread yourself too thin. We ran into that problem when I was the national chairman of the program. With Los Angeles, they had a mayor down there that every time any ethnic group came to him why he started a sister city and pretty soon they had a sister city in every country in the world practically. And there would be some enthusiasm about getting it and then it would just die out because there were no people to carry it on and I kept getting calls from City Council members in Los Angeles saying can't you stop the mayor? Our committee was set up to encourage sister cities not to stop them. There wasn't anything in the world to do to stop him. But Los Angeles became pretty much of a joke because of the fact they have all these sister cities

none of which were very active. Where San Jose was very active, in fact, it still is. They still have the student exchange program going on. Every year they bring over a couple of students from Okayama and they send a couple from San Jose over there. So it's still an active program whereas some of the others you never hear about. There's San Jose as a sister city in Vera Cruz, Mexico it's dormant. The one in San Jose, Costa Rica comes up periodically because of the similarity in names, but that's about it, it doesn't do very much. I'm afraid as soon as the mayor leaves office the one in Ireland is going to fold up too or just become dormant. It won't fold up obviously.

EG: Are you still active with the sister cities?

RD: No, I kind of dropped out of a lot of things except for the museum. Actually when I retired in '76 and then my wife was ill for five years, I became almost inactive in everything during those five years, and so I just haven't gotten back into the sister city. I'm still interested, I'm still a member, but I haven't been active now for several years.

EG: You were such a good representive for San Jose that it would be nice to have you back.

RD: Well the mayor is actually the honorary chairman of Pacific Neighbors, he's the one that represents the city.

EG: What about today's growth, I guess we don't have a great deal of annexation now or attempts of annexation?

RD: No, most of it's just filling in. There's a lot of land that can be filled in before much more annexation takes place. Well here again if it can be done, back to my point earlier, with some planning so that you don't have the problems that we had and the growth is such that you had competing groups. The city limits between Campbell and San Jose is ridiculous. There's a long arm of Campbell that extends into San Jose and there's a long arm of San Jose that extends into Campbell because you simply annex those people that wanted to annex. Of course we weren't

the only ones you take a look at the city limits between Santa Clara and Sunnyvale you will find that long arm of Santa Clara right in the middle of Sunnyvale. Every city in the county was doing this sort of thing and that meant you couldn't have any real planning so that the haphazard growth of the area is primarily a result of the political situation.

EG: I understand again that during the years between 1950 and 1960 when there was so much annexation that the city didn't even have a general plan until 1960.

RD: It was rather difficult to get a general plan because you didn't know what areas you could plan for.

EG: A general plan might have helped to?

RD: There was a plan except that it changed so often. The original general plan called for your commercial areas to all be downtown. Well then of course with Macy's and the Emporium why that had to change to go along with what had happened. The plan pretty much followed the annexation rather than the other way around. The same thing with IBM. That was never zoned for light industry until IBM came down there and then it had to be zoned for light industry. So that type of growth meant that you couldn't have a plan that you could follow because you never knew which direction the city was going to go.

EG: Just to give us an idea of the growth can you give us some of the population figures over the years; do you have that in your mind?

RD: Yeah when I was elected it was just under a hundred thousand in 1950. By 1960 it had doubled to 200,000 and by 1970 it had doubled again to 400,000, and by 1980 it didn't quite double it was about 600,000 then. Of course right now it's around 750.000. It slowed down, the percentage slowed, but it's still growing. San Jose is bigger than San Francisco now, not that that's anything to be proud of but some people think it is. Unfortunately the growth brings problems of big cities.

EG: Yes the traffic congestion, pollution. When you were mayor I believe there was a lot of a big issue over the sewer and --

RD: Well one thing that encouraged development all over the other city was the fact that San Jose allowed the formation of sewer districts. The sanitation district and each supervisoral district had a sanitation district. Number four, for example, which is in suporvisoral district four also included the City of San Jose, Santa Clara, Monte Sereno, Saratoga and Los Gatos. All of those were hooked on to the City of San Jose sewer system. A lot of people said that if San Jose hadn't done that that you wouldn't have had an independent City of Saratoga for instance. They point out that Willow Glen annexed to San Jose strictly to hook up to the San Jose sewer system. That was done in 1936 and they had reached a point where they couldn't get by on septic tanks anymore and they had to be hooked to a sewer system. So they had a vote and Willow Glen had incorporated a few years earlier as a city in order to try to keep the Southern Pacific out of building their new line through Willow Glen but by 1936 the line had been relocated anyway and so that was no longer an issue and they simply had to vote to annex to San Jose in order to hook up the sewer. The politics of sewers is an interesting one.

EG: And of course sewer goes along with water and we're just in the fourth year of the drought now and I find it interesting that your platform when you were first elected was on this water issue, and now we're really back to a water issue.

RD: Now, well of course we simply -- no matter what happens even in the Hetch Hetchy line as you probably have read the reservoir is only half full up there so we couldn't count on much water from San Franciso and the East Bay or the South Bay Aqueduct does bring in some water but here again it is not just a local problem it's all over the State of California. So all of our resources are rather difficult. Fortunately there is no immediate problem because of the fact that so much of this water has been stored underground and as I read it the underground table is still

fairly good. So we are not about to run out of water this year. They're trying to cut back of course and conserve water. We don't want to have to lower the water table so much. What had happened is the water was being pumped out of the ground so rapidly that the whole floor of the valley was sinking and in the basement of the old Bank of America building, there was a standing pipe that was flush to the ground when it was put in and as the whole floor of the valley was sinking that standpipe was now six feet in the air. Or it was back in 1950 because when the water table is lowered you never can replenish that water underneath. It's not like a sponge where it will go up again. Once it goes down you can never get it up again. So that was one of the reasons why water was a big issue in 1950. Then shortly after that they built the -- well a number of these dams around the valley to try to conserve the water. Again, the Santa Clara Water Conservation District takes that water and puts, it percolates it, underground so that's where that water is being stored right now is underground.

EG: Did you have water rationing at any time back then?

RD: No, we never got to that point.

EG: You never got to that point. You kind of look back on your years on the city council and also when you were mayor can you think of some specific things that you would do differently. Now you mentioned annexation that you would have maybe gone along with Dutch Hamann on some of them, but is there anything other than perhaps that the officers at that time should have done different?

RD: Yeah, a lot of things that we should have done different. We couldn't because of the fact as I say the political situation was such that we had no authority over unincorporated land. We couldn't decide, okay, this is where we should have residential area, this should be commercial because if it was out in the county we had no control over it. Again that goes back to what I was saying earlier. If we had had a borough system with the planning for the whole county I think

it would have been better for the growth of the county. You couldn't stop the growth but it probably could have been done in a little more orderly way.

EG: What about the issues today in San Jose versus what you had come up then; can you kind of compare them? We talked about the ethnic situation and really it has not changed a lot. It's much better than it was in some ways and yet there's a big short fall, but is there anything else?

RD: Of course right now today the big issue is the Giants, the city council is having to vote on that right now. I have mixed feelings. I am quite a baseball fan. I used to coach baseball but I have some mixed feelings about whether or not the city should or the public should, finance a private industry that has so much money that they can pay millions of dollars to their players. I don't know if I would vote for that or not frankly.

EG: What about back then, did you have an issue like that then?

RD: Oh, as a matter of fact I was all in favor of putting up a stadium. Dutch and I flew over an area over the eastern foothills where there was a natural amphitheater, would have been wonderful for a stadium because-- I was thinking in terms of it being used publicly by San Jose State and San Jose City College and some of the high schools that sort of thing. We were pushing that type of thing. I was always interested in trying to get sports facilities but not to the extent that we would turn it over to private persons for their gain. This was going to be used strictly for public use. I'm still interested in sports, again, I have great doubts about the wisdom of the public financing to privately owned enterprises that can pay such high salaries. I think a lot of people are a little bit turned off by the salaries that are being paid by both basketball, football, and baseball.

EG: I think I'd be turned off too if I was being paid $5.00 to help run a city.

RD: Actually it was difficult to get people to run for the council and they took a look and said, oh my gosh I can't do that work. We had one very capable councilman, a lawyer by the name of

Emery Gomez Delmas we were very good friends. He served four years and he said this is just skimming $500 and that was a lot of money, just skimming $500 right off the top of my salary and I just can't afford it to do this any more. It's cutting down on my law practice so he didn't run for reelection. He was a good person and we lost him and that was one of the problems of getting people. I used to try to convince some of my friends to run. They would say, what, get all that abuse for $5.00; you must be crazy.

EG: Tell me about it, was that $5.00 a week?

RD: $5.00 a week. Well a maximum of $5.00 a meeting with a maximum of five meetings a month because the meetings of course were on Monday so normally you would have four meetings a month so normally it was $20.00 a month. If you missed a meeting then of course you didn't get paid for it. In 1957 I was invited by the German Government to be a consultant to the cities in Germany and I was gone for six weeks so I missed six meetings so I lost out on $30.

EG: That wasn't a real fortune was it, that you lost out on?

RD: The only thing that saved me was the fact that I was -- the German government paid my way and I picked up a little extra money writing articles for the San Jose Mercury. They paid me $25.00 an article. I wrote an article a week.

EG: Can you think of anything else you would like to talk about today or any stories you would like to tell us. I just wanted to ask you one more thing, Bob. I understand that you were on the campaign – you campaigned for Janet Gray Hayes when she ran for mayor. Can you tell us how this campaign was versus when you first ran?

RD: Yes, Janet Gray Hayes and I had served on the Redevelopment Agency together and she was the chairman and I was her vice chairman and so I got to know her very well. I admired her and she was the kind of person that you could disagree with without getting into personality arguments and so when she ran for council first I was very happy when she asked me to be on

her campaign committee I said fine I'll be very happy to campaign for you. She did a good job. I have no regrets about campaigning for her.

EG: Were there a lot of differences in the way you had to campaign then versus the way you first did?

RD: It was more of a positive type of campaign. I would say it wasn't a dirty campaign. I don't recall anybody trying to throw mud at that time.

EG: A lot of money though?

RD: Oh, yes. It was much more expensive then because you had to do a lot more campaigning and the city was obviously a lot bigger and ads in the paper were more expensive. Yes, it took a lot more money but again it was a cleaner campaign. One of the little problems that came up right at the end of this last campaign for mayor, and I hope it doesn't happen again, both of the leading candidates well -- I don't know if they did it or their campaign committee, started throwing some mud at their opponents. I didn't like that and I hope they don't do that again. I guess they figure that dirty politics win, but I don't think it's necessary on the local level.

EG: And you don't feel like you had that back when you ran?

RD: Well, we had the dirty politics in 1950 but after that when I ran again it didn't come up at all. I'd been there and they didn't see that I was going to turn the city over to Joe Stalin.

EG: It's been fascinating talking to you today, Bob. I look forward to doing interviews of a different type with you on your military service and investigating --

RD: Like I say, people are still interested in Hitler.

EG: I think we always will be but it has been fascinating. Thank you very much for being here with us.

RD: You're welcome it's been my pleasure. I always like to talk about the good old days.

EG: Thank you very much.